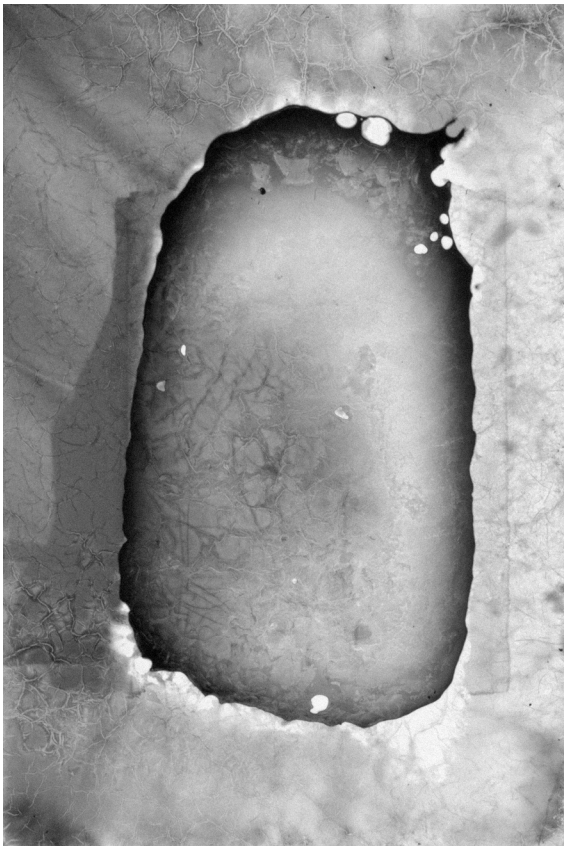
Clint Enns

A Natural History of Forgotten Moments



Clint Enns

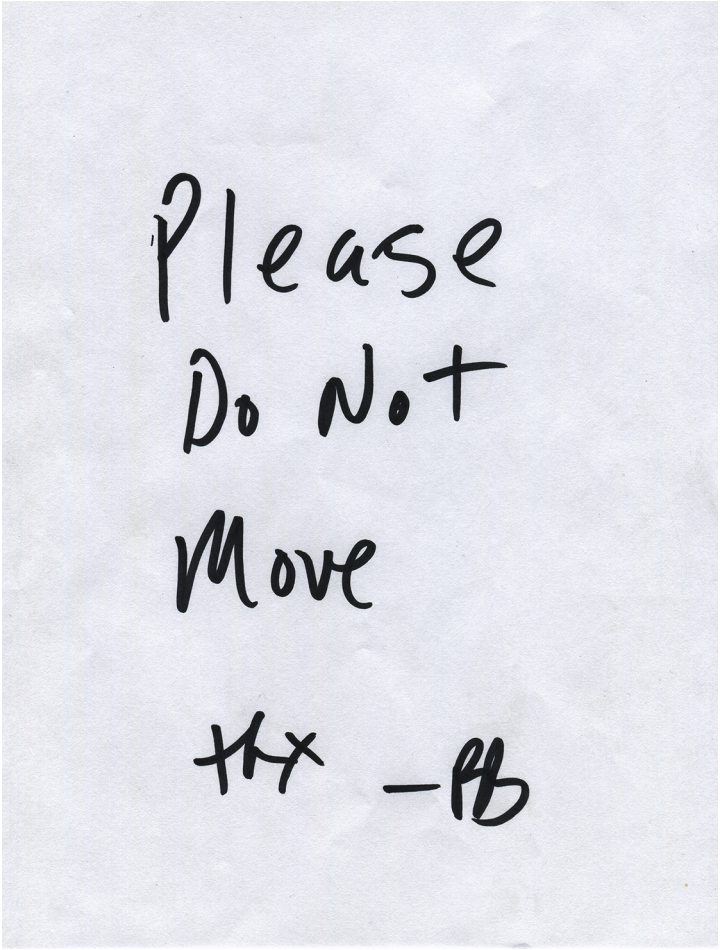
A Natural History of Forgotten Moments

Pictures and Stories

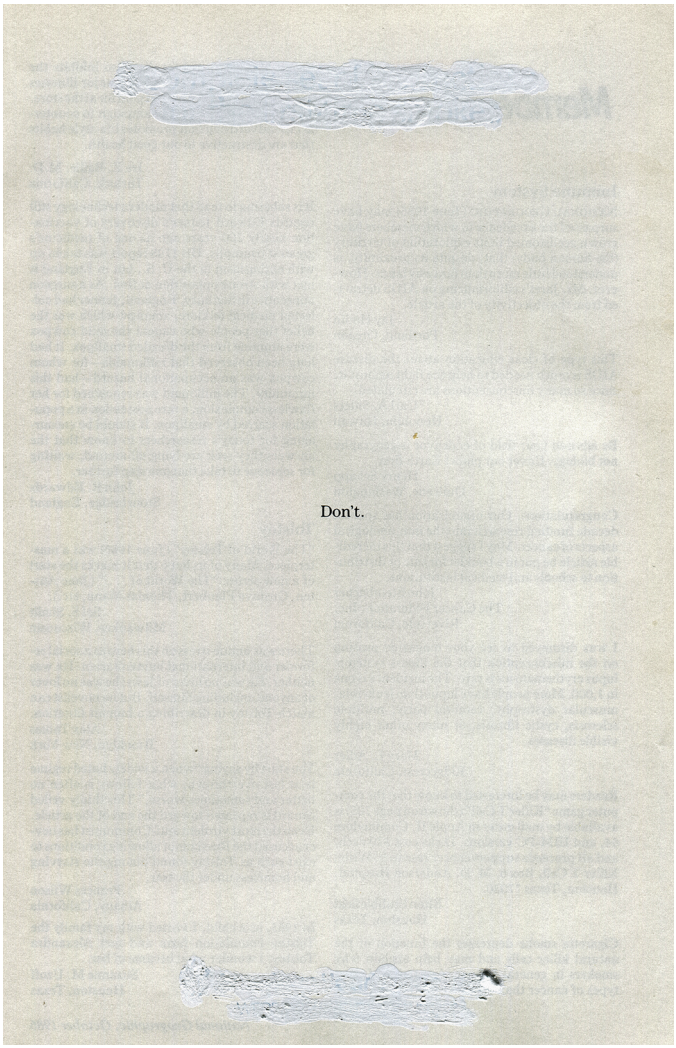
for Emma

Introduction

This short artist book is constructed from a series of fragmented ideas and thoughts developed while living as a visitor in the City of Saints. This book contains personal reflections, observations, found photographs, and snapshots that I collected while wandering the streets, *les brocantes* and *les marchés aux puces* of Montréal. The writing in this book is personal but not necessarily autobiographical. It also inevitably reflects my ever-growing obsession with the cruelest of games, an edict of chance and uncertainty, backgammon. As Bill Robertie states in his classic introduction to the game, "in the short run, there are no guarantees. You may become an excellent player and still lose a 100-point session to a clod, or get knocked out in the first round of six consecutive tournaments, or reach the final of the biggest tournament of your life and loose 0-25. Those are the breaks. If you can't handle that much uncertainty, tough. Go play chess." To this end, this book embraces uncertainty and those moments where the roll of the dice ultimately determines our fate.



Please Do Not Move thx – PB



Post-Minimalism (Don't)

The Culture of the Void

After a short period of time in Montréal, I am without a permanent home and spend most of my days wandering and writing. My relationship with the girl I moved out here for is failing and it is only a matter of time before I am politely asked to leave. Filled with a feeling of emptiness and realizing that these will be our last days together, I am surprisingly content.

The void is always present, even between lovers. We are enticed by ideas that distract us from this omnipresent discontinuity, realizing that it is impossible to live in that frozen moment created by Yves Klein in *Saut dans le vide* (*Leap into the Void*), where pure bliss is suspended indefinitely from imminent self-destruction.

A Polaroid Camera Ad from 1967:

Life goes by so fast.

Stop for a moment and take a look at it.

Some hashtags that have been restricted on Instagram:

#adulting #alone #americangirl #ariefmirna2015 #armparty #asia #asiandick #attractive #babyrp #bacak #badbitcztwerk #baddie #balenciaga #balls #bang #bangbang #batikate #beaty #belfie #bi #bigdickboy #bikinibody #bombshell #bootay #bootybounce #bra #brain #breast #buns #butt #butts #cam #carving #catsau #cesitone #cheeky #citycentre #commentschivettes #costumes #cph #cpr #csun #cumfession #curvesfordays #curvy #damngirl #datass #date #dating #desk #direct #dm #dominant #dripping #dutchgirl #dxb #easter #ebonyandivory #edm #edmbabes #eggplant #eggplants #eggporn #elevator #escilepernatale #estellaseraphim #everybodyisbeautiful #excitada #expose #fapstagram #feetofatlanta #fishnets #foreplay #freakshow #freethenipple #gays #gilofashion #girlsonly #gloves #goddess #hamishnadine #happythanksgiving #hardsummer #hijabiba #hooters #hornyyyyyyyasf #hotgirls #hotguy #hots #hottie #humpday #iamgay #instagirl #instamood #istanbulgay#italiano #jugs #kansas #kickoff #kik #kikgirl #kikmessenger #killingit #kissing #lavache #lesbian #lesbiansofinstagram #lilmandingo #lingerie #lust #marcoreus #master #mebelim #medicina #mexicangirl #mirrorphoto #mixedgirls #models #mr40club #mrsandmrsbordeaux #mrtox #nacket #nasty #newyears #newyearsday #ngento #oovoo #petite #piroka #pixie #poop #pornfood #printic #publicrelations #pushups #rack #ravebabes #roleplay #russiangirl #russianmilf #saltwater #sexlife #shebad #shesquats #shit #shower #single #singlelife #skype #slimthick #snap #snapback #snapchat #snapchatgay #snapme #sokus #sopretty #spanishgirl #sparklingnudes #stopdropandyoga #stranger #streetphoto #stud #submission #sultry #sunbathing #swole #tag4like #takeitoff #teens #tgif #thatasstho #thick #thought #todayimwearing #treviso #twerk #twerker #undies #valentinesday #vatine #weed #weedstagram #weezmoney #wet #whitegirl #woman #womancrushwednesday #women #workflow

The Ephemeral Moment

Montréal is often referred to as *la ville aux cent clochers* due to Mark Twain's now cliché description he provided while visiting the city in the late 19th century: “This is the first time I was ever in a city where you couldn't throw a brick without breaking a church window.” Despite being a city watched over by the grace of God, *le Quartier des spectacles de Montréal* with its brothels, gambling dens, and booze cans, most markedly during the prohibition era, provided the city with another nickname, the Sin City of the North. Instant gratification peacefully co-existed with the promise of eternal salvation, or at least until 1954 when Judge François Caron was appointed head of a public inquiry to crack down on police corruption, gambling, brothels and boozing.

The Polaroid satisfies a similar desire for instant gratification and eternal salvation. Apparently, Edwin Land invented the camera in response to a question posed by his impatient daughter. An immediate affirmation that the moment has happened, suspended in time for eternity.

Susan Sontag argues:

> All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.

This idea can be seen as an extension of André Bazin's description of photography as a form of embalming. Following this line of reasoning, the Polaroid creates an instant death mask.

The Polaroid was initially marketed as a social form of media. As an advertisement from 1950 promises: "You're the life of the party with a Polaroid Land Camera." Using the apparatus we have just established, one might argue that the Polaroid camera allows us to socially engage with one another's mortality, vulnerability and mutability, transforming the act of taking a photo into a social activity. The reality is, these moments of sharing, like most photographs, are inevitably forgotten. In the Insta era, these memento mori are exchanged for ♥s. The frozen moments

have quickly thawed, producing a flood of images to be judged and forgotten in a frenzy of taps and swipes.

The Polaroids in the following series were discovered in flea markets in and around Montréal.

To Mom, Love Lois (12/27/79)

Misty in the Window

On Vacation

Dutch Windmill

At Sea

Herd of Cows in the Fog

Up (8/11/98)

Parrot Sanctuary

#lavache

AMOUR

Et l'amour ? Il faut nous laver
De cette crasse héréditaire
Où notre vermine stellaire
Continue à se prélasser

L'orgue, l'orgue qui moud le vent
Le ressac de la mer furieuse
Sont comme la mélodie creuse
De ce rêve déconcertant

D'Elle, de nous, ou de cette âme
Que nous assîmes au banquet
Dites-nous quel est le trompé
O inspirateur des infâmes

Celle qui couche dans mon lit
Et partage l'air de ma chambre
Peut jouer aux dés sur la table
Le ciel même de mon esprit

- Antonin Artaud, *Tric Trac du ciel*

LOVE

What about love ? We must wash away
This hereditary filth
Where our stellar vermin
Continue to loaf.

The organ, the organ grinding the wind
And the furious ocean's surf,
Are like the empty melody
Of this disconcerting dream.

Of her, of us, or of this soul
We sat at the banquet,
Tell us who are deceived,
O inspirer of the infamous.

She who sleeps in my bed
Sharing the air in my room
Can cast dice on the table,
The very heavens of my mind.

Celestial Backgammon

Backgammon (or one of its close variants) is often considered one of the oldest games in existence. Not ironically, the evidence supporting this claim is a set of dice from ancient Mesopotamia that were made from human bones. Just recall the backgammon board in the foreground of Dutch painter Jan Steen's *Argument over a Card Game.* In the painting, two drunkards stand holding weapons, on the brink of murder, after a card game has gone horribly wrong. Another of Steen's backgammon paintings, *The Backgammon Player*, was involved in a different type of dispute, that of ownership. The painting, stolen from Philippe Marcq's home in 1979, became the object of controversy in 1997 when it was offered to Christie's for auction by Carl Schünemann. Three years later, Schünemann and Christie's were involved in another controversy, this time involving a painting that was looted by Nazis in 1937 from Ulla and Moritz Rosenthal, a Jewish couple who died in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Two reviews of *Backgammon NJ* on the App Store:

"Ripoff!"
Computer cheats regardless of what the developer may say! Don't buy it!!

"Cynical programming"
Chu has researched his game. The computer play is adequate, but certainly not superior in the expert mode. What enables the computer to win is consistently perfect rolls -- against all odds. The computer was able to bear off in one game in which I led by rolling three doubles in a row. 216 to 1. The human is given inferior rolls ostensibly to provide the illusion of expert play. Too bad. I had high hopes for this one. Wasted my money.

The dice are cruel and the proportion of luck to skill in backgammon is often considered approximately 80 to 20, but a 20 percent edge can be a significant advantage. In backgammon, as in life, the forgiving generosity of a deity has been subsumed by inexorable fate. As Bruce Becker, author of the controversial *Backgammon for Blood,* reminds us in what is perhaps the most aggressively masculine book about the game: "Luck is for losers." To Becker, backgammon is a daring game of skill. But, even he is intimidated by the dice.

> Therefore, when I believe my opponent will not accept the cube, I double. I don't want him to accept, ever. As far as I'm concerned, the cube is not a doubling tool, it is primarily a weapon with which I expect to force my opponent out of the game. I always want him to refuse, for *I distrust and fear the fickleness of the dice*.

The dice are unjust, but it is precisely this element that keeps the underdog interested. In *On Backgammon*, Barclay Cooke writes, "the game's apparent simplicity is its initial attraction. But its simplicity is of *infinite variety*, and is an amalgam of science and art." It is the casting of dice that both determines our fate and reveals a universe of possibilities.

The photographs in the following series were shot around Montréal while playing a game of chance with my 14MP Fujifilm FinePix AV200 and its broken sensor.

Broken Sensor #1

Broken Sensor #2

Broken Sensor #3

Broken Sensor #4

Garden Decay #1

Garden Decay #2

Sorel Landscape

Self-*Portrait*

Emma

The New Flesh

Cat Sweater

Thumbs Up

Forgotten Landscape

The Chaos of the Dice

Many people who played backgammon have switched to poker simply because there is no money left in the game. The game has passed out of popularity, but its time will come again. Those left playing are either purists, unable to master poker, or just too lazy to try. At one point in time, Montréal had an active backgammon community gathering in a bar above a magazine store called Le Gammon. The games that took place there were considered legendary at the time, but it seems they have been forgotten. Every roll of the dice, every universe created, lost in the river of time.

It is impossible not to desire eternal salvation in the City of Saints. At the same time, the temptations found within *l'île du péché* are often too great for weak souls to resist. In a humorous essay titled "Concerning Chess," H.G. Wells describes chess in such terms. He also uses it as a euphemism for love:

> The mild delight of a pretty mate is the least unhappy phase of it. But, generally, you find afterwards that you ought to have mated two moves before, or at the time that an unforeseen reply takes your Queen.

He continues, “there is no remorse like the remorse of chess.” Wells had obviously not been introduced to the delightfully cruel game of backgammon, which is arguably a more apt metaphor for love, at least in my experience.

When playing backgammon, you enter a universe of suspended bliss; that is, until the crushing reality that you have left your pieces trapped in your opponent's home board for far too long and are forced into playing a risky back game. Becker swore by this style of playing; but he is generally not considered an expert player. A back game is usually something a player is forced into, not something one chooses. And when a back game works, it is great. But when it doesn't, it is terribly pathetic, often ending in a gammon, or infinitely worse, a backgammon. As with love, it is the roll of the dice that dictates your fate.